

## VU Research Portal

### Who is in the stepfamily? Change in stepparents' family boundaries between 1992-2009

Suanet, B.; van der Pas, S.; van Tilburg, T.G.

***published in***

Journal of Marriage and Family  
2013

***DOI (link to publisher)***

[10.1111/jomf.12053](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12053)

***document version***

Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

***citation for published version (APA)***

Suanet, B., van der Pas, S., & van Tilburg, T. G. (2013). Who is in the stepfamily? Change in stepparents' family boundaries between 1992-2009. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75, 1070-1083.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12053>

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)



**Who is in the Stepfamily? Change in Stepparents' Family  
Boundaries between 1992-2009**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>
Manuscript ID:	JMF-2012-3271-MS.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	Families in middle and later life < Adult Development and Aging, Intergenerational relations < Intergenerational, Sociohistorical change < Social Context, Stepfamilies < Family Structure, Social trends/ social change < Demography

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts  
Review

Who is in the Stepfamily?

Change in Stepparents' Family Boundaries between 1992-2009

Bianca Suanet, Suzan van der Pas, Theo G. van Tilburg

Bianca Suanet, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, VU University Amsterdam, Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands, tel.: +31205986790, fax: +31205986810, email: [b.a.suanet@vu.nl](mailto:b.a.suanet@vu.nl).

Suzan van der Pas, EMGO Institute, Institute for Health and Care Research, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, VU Medical Center, Van Boechorststraat 7, 1081BT, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, tel.: +31204446014, fax: +31204446775, email: [s.vanderpas@vumc.nl](mailto:s.vanderpas@vumc.nl)

Theo G. Van Tilburg, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, VU University Amsterdam, Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands, tel.: +31205983529, fax: +31205986810, email: [t.g.van.tilburg@vu.nl](mailto:t.g.van.tilburg@vu.nl).

Acknowledgements: This study is based on data collected in the context of the two research programs. The 'Living Arrangements and Social Networks of Older Adults in the Netherlands' was funded by the Netherlands Program for Research on Aging. The 'Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam' ([www.lasa-vu.nl](http://www.lasa-vu.nl)) is largely supported by a grant from the Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, Directorate of Long-Term Care.

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 2

## Abstract

Guided by trends of increased prevalence and social acceptance of stepfamilies, we argue that stepparents' are more likely to include stepchildren in their personal network in recent times. Data are from observations by two studies, i.e. Living Arrangements and Social Networks of Older Adults, and Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam in 1992-2009 of 247 Dutch stepparents aged 54-91 years. Results revealed that in 1992 63% of the stepparents had stepchildren in their personal network, and this percentage increased to 85% in 2009. The network membership of stepchildren is less likely for stepparents from living-apart-together partnerships. Stepmothers less often included stepchildren in their personal network than stepfathers. Both effects may be understood in terms of family commitment. Stepfamily boundaries have become more 'permeable' over time, suggesting that there is an increased potential for support exchange and caregiving within stepfamilies.

Key words: Families in middle and later life < Adult Development and Aging; Intergenerational relations < Intergenerational; Social trends/social change < Demography; Sociohistorical change < Social Context; Stepfamilies < Family Structure

Who is in the Stepfamily?

Change in Stepparents' Family Boundaries between 1992-2009

The vast increase in divorce and diverse marital and partnership transitions is one of the main demographic changes in western societies over the last decades (Amato & James, 2010; Cherlin, 2010). Like most other modern industrialized societies, the Netherlands has witnessed a strong increase in divorce rates in the 1960's and 1970's after which the trend stabilized or even reversed slightly (Latten, 2004). Remarriage rates have decreased since 1970 in the Netherlands for divorced and widowed individuals, but these were often replaced by cohabiting or living apart together relationships. As a result of diverse marital and partnership transitions, families with stepchildren are making up an increasingly larger proportion of the population (Teachman & Tedrow, 2008). Particularly stepfamilies have been found to generate uncertainty with regard to the boundaries of families (Furstenberg, 1987). The elevated levels of uncertainty in stepfamilies on who is part of the family network and who is not can be understood from the lack of clear social roles and responsibilities in these families (Cherlin, 1978). Understanding the functioning of stepfamilies, and in particular relationships between older parent and their adult stepchildren, is vital to appraise future viability of stepfamilies in providing care to older adults.

In this study, we argue that socio-cultural changes in the second half of the twentieth century have increased the inclusion of stepchildren as a regular and important tie in the networks of stepparents. A loss of constraints and embeddedness provided by traditional social structures and communities, such as the family, church and neighborhood, can be observed. This process has been described as 'de-traditionalization' (Giddens, 1990). New patterns of partnership and family structure have developed, encompassing next to an increase in divorce and remarriage rates also a rise in cohabitation and living-apart-together relationships (Cherlin,

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 4

2010). At the same time, the social acceptance of more diverse family behavior has increased (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). In a situation in which stepfamilies become more common and more socially accepted, it is more likely that stepchildren will be included in the stepparents' family network.

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to examine the extent to which stepfamily boundaries have changed over time, and (2) to explore the factors associated with stepfamily boundaries. Specifically we will focus on whether older stepparents include their stepchildren in their personal network, i.e., whether older stepparents consider stepchildren as significant others with whom support might be exchanged (Kahn & Antonucci, 1981). The boundaries of the family network are a matter of perspective and are defined by the individual within the stepfamily (Schmeeckle, Giarrusso, Feng & Bengtson, 2006). Each family member may have a very different network of kin (Cherlin, 1978) depending on conditions such as common residence (De Jong Gierveld, 2004) or duration and quality of the relationship (Ganong & Coleman, 2006). This study aims to more systematically address the stepparent's definition of who is within the stepfamily.

We address our research questions on the basis of a sample of Dutch older stepparents. The Netherlands is a fairly typical example of a (late) modernized and industrialized country. Divorce rates have been at an intermediate level in the Netherlands and have been higher in the United States (Blossfeld & Muller, 2002; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006). In both countries, the increase in rates of divorce was concentrated primarily in the 1960's and 1970's and stabilized or even reversed slightly after that (Cherlin, 2010; Latten, 2004). Despite this, there are indications that this trend is different for those above the age of 50, as this group is more likely to have experienced divorce over the last two decades in the United States (Brown & Fen-Lin, 2012).

Remarriage rates in the Netherlands have also been somewhat lower than in the United States (Statistics Netherlands, 1999; Bumpass, Sweet & Castro Martin, 1990). In the Netherlands, cohabitation and living-apart together relationships are more commonplace than in the United States, not only as second union but also as first union. Attitudes towards non-traditional family behavior (e.g. divorce, remarriage, gender equality, pre-marital sexuality) have become more tolerant in both countries (Kraaykamp, 2002; The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 1994; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). A survey on value change in the 1990's showed that on average, the Dutch were among those with the least traditional value orientations, also when they are compared to Americans (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Family network boundaries

Family boundaries have widely been used to study the effects of family membership change on individual and family functioning (Caroll, Olson & Buckmiller, 2007). The idea of family boundaries is based on the family systems theory that perceives the family as a system composed of various subsystems that allow different members to carry out their roles and functions (Walker & Messinger, 1979). Family boundaries can contribute to a sense of identity that differentiates one group from another (Walker & Messinger, 1979). An important issue in the definition of family boundaries is the meaning that individuals give to their family in response to changes within the family, like births and marriages (Boss, 1980). Becoming part of a stepfamily is likely to make family boundaries more uncertain and more permeable, as the roles and norms are less clear than in first-marriage biological families (Cherlin, 2004). In stepfamilies more than in biological families, familial roles are 'achieved' rather than 'ascribed' (Walker & Messinger, 1979). Stewart (2005) observed that family boundaries are more uncertain when two parents bring in children from earlier unions (complex stepfamilies) than when one parent brought in a

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 6

child from a former union (simple stepfamilies). In addition, there is more uncertainty of the family boundaries when adult children did not reside with their stepparent (Pasley, 1987).

Clearly, family boundaries depend on the complexity of the family structure and a history of co-residence. As stepfamilies have more permeable boundaries than nuclear families, in this study, we perceive the family as a network in which stepchildren can be included on the basis of their perceived importance. In other words, we propose that not the structural position of the stepchild as such matters for assessing future care giving potential of families, but whether or not the stepchild and stepparent perceive each other as part of the family network.

### Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Are stepfamilies still 'incomplete institutions'?

As argued in the introduction, our study departs from the notion that socio-cultural changes in the last century are likely to have increased the inclusion of stepchildren by stepparents in the family network. During the first half of the twentieth century, individuals were strongly embedded in more traditional social communities (Giddens, 1990). Institutions such as families, political institutions, and churches played a large role in protecting and constraining individuals. In the 1950's, boundaries were predominantly constructed around the 'nuclear' family consisting of two-parent families with only biological children (Parsons & Bales, 1955). The home was considered the major arena of family life. There was a sharp gender-based division of labor with men as the main breadwinner and women mainly responsible for the household and child rearing. This type of family became the cultural ideal and was seen as standard (Smith, 1993). During the 1950's, the proportion of children that grew up in a two-parent biological family was higher than ever before in history, making this a period of exceptional family stability (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1988).



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

In a situation that emphasized the importance of two-parent biological families, it is likely that stepchildren were not included in the personal networks of stepparents. Stepchildren did not fit in the cultural ideal of what a family was. Cherlin (1978) has termed remarriages that existed in and before the 1970's as 'incomplete institutions', resulting from a lack of normative guidelines about conduct in higher order marriages and the lack of adequate social and legal support for step families in those era's. In line with this view, obligations to support older parents are weaker when parents are not biologically related (Ganong & Coleman, 2006). Additionally, Pezzin, Pollak, and Steinberg Schone (2008) showed that parents with stepchildren in the family were indeed less likely to receive cash and time transfers and were less likely to live with their stepchild.

From the 1970's onwards, personal relationships have become less socially rooted and more fluid than before (Allan, 2001). Individuals became more in charge of the management of their own personal relations, also with regard to step-relationships (Sweeney, 2010). Already in his 1978 article, Cherlin hypothesized that over time stepfamilies would become more accepted. He suggested that norms and guidelines on how to behave within stepfamilies in everyday life as well as solve problems specific to these family types were likely to develop. The increased personal autonomy in relationships imply that content and emotional importance of relationships are less tied to structural family positions and roles than in earlier times, and more to individual needs and preferences. Additionally, like stated in the introduction, these developments coincided with a trend towards more tolerant attitudes concerning diverse family behavior (Kraaykamp, 2002; The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 1994; Schmeeckle et al., 2006; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Cooney and Dunne (2001) argued that people are increasingly adjusting to marital patterns that involve remarriage, especially after divorce. Schmeeckle et al. (2006)

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 8

observed that about four fifth of adult children perceived current stepparents to be full or partial family members, and about half perceived them a little, quite a bit or fully as parent. Children of divorced parents may attach less importance to inheritance and parental loyalties and will be more supportive of parental remarriage.

We propose that because stepfamilies have become more common and therefore possibly also more 'normal,' people might be more equipped to deal with complex family structures than before. The increased tolerance and awareness of diverse family forms may affect how parents experience remarriage and their relationship with stepchildren. These developments may lead to increased likelihood of inclusion of stepchildren in the family network. For this study we have data available on network membership from 1992 to 2009. We expect that the older stepparents' network membership of stepchildren has increased over this period of time (Hypothesis 1).

#### Stepfamily boundaries and family commitment

The concept of family commitment is relevant to the understanding of stepfamily boundaries. Very little is known about the commitment between (step)parents and (step)children (Allan, Hawker & Crow, 2001). A family member's commitment is dependent on future likelihood of continuing family relationships and the process of uncertainty reduction (Downs, 2004). These aspects of commitment may be affected by the duration of the relationship and physical closeness.

The duration of the step-relationship is related to the moment when the stepfamily was formed, either earlier in the parental life course when children are of minor age, or later in the parental life course when children are adults (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Marsiglio, 1992; Schmeeckle et al., 2006). We expect that in the stepfamilies where the stepchildren entered as a minor, stepparents will more often include the stepchildren in the personal network in

comparison to those stepfamilies where the stepchildren entered as an adult (Hypothesis 2).

Stepfamilies might be formed after remarriage or other forms of partnering in later life. Nowadays it is not obvious that these new partnerships may also lead to co-residence. Older people might opt for starting a living-apart-together partnership motivated to continue their social and family relationships like before (De Jong Gierveld, 2004). Frequency of contact with stepchildren is affected by whether the partners live in the same household. Stepfamilies might include a situation where stepchildren have never been part of the household of the stepparent, and stepchildren visit the biological parent without being in contact with the non-co-residing stepparent. Cohabitation between partners is associated with lower levels of commitment than marriage (Poortman & Mills, 2012) and greater ambiguity in social roles (Brown & Manning, 2009; Stewart, 2005). Although an earlier study has shown that cohabiting stepparents perceived less contact with stepchildren than married stepparents (Van der Pas & Van Tilburg, 2010), no prior studies have been conducted on non-residential stepfamilies, i.e., step-relationships based on a living-apart-together partnership. One can reasonably expect that commitment and clarity regarding roles is lower if the partner who brought in the stepchildren does not live in the household and this may have an effect on whether or not the stepchild is seen as part of the family network. We therefore expect that within residential stepfamilies, stepparents will more often include the stepchildren in the personal network than within non-residential stepfamilies (Hypothesis 3).

The role of gender

Prior research has shown that the gender of the parent is relevant in stepfamily relationships (Kalmijn, 2007; Schmeeckle, 2007; Van der Pas & Van Tilburg, 2010). Fathers who have divorced, widowed or remarried have less contact and receive less support from their

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 10

biological children in comparison to mothers. The effect can be explained by the reduced investments that fathers have in their children if they have left the household at an early age. The impact of custody arrangements also leaves less opportunity for the non-custodial parent, who is still often the father, to see their biological children (Seltzer, 1991).

Often kin relationships and childrearing are managed largely by women (Cooney & Dunne, 2001; Rosenthal, 1985). This kin keeper role might lead to a sharper division among women between who is family and who is not, and to favoring biological kin over step kin. Particularly the stepmother-stepchild relationship has been identified as the most problematic step-relationship (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 2008). This is more so if the stepchild has lived with the stepmother. However, stepmothers can also be seen as significant kin keepers, possibly putting a great deal of energy into developing contact and closeness with their minor-age and adult stepchildren. In a study on gender dynamics in stepfamilies, Schmeeckle (2007) observed that stepmothers are likely to be more involved with their biological children than stepfathers, increasing the possibility of competition and conflict with the biological mother. Stepfathers in contrast have been noted to parent the children with whom they live. On the basis of these results, it can be expected that stepmothers will have less commitment towards stepchildren than stepfathers. In summary, we hypothesize that stepmothers will less often include their stepchildren in the personal network than stepfathers (Hypothesis 4).

#### Other variables

Various aspects of family structure and parental characteristics are also relevant. Age captures generational variation and age-related differences such as in the domain of physical capacities. The parent's educational level might be related to relational competence and abilities to handle complex situations. Stepchildren's status might be related to the number of family

members and the number of relationships in the personal network. Gender composition describes the availability of stepdaughters and stepsons.

Measuring the boundaries of family networks

As noted before, one of the main aspects of family boundaries is the meaning that is given to specific relationships. In our study, we view the family from a network perspective and look at whether stepparents name their stepchildren as an important tie with whom they maintain regular contact. Over the life course, the network membership of stepchildren can change, resulting in a shift of the boundaries of the family network as experienced by the stepparent. If stepparents identify their stepchildren as a tie with whom there is important and regular contact, we view the stepchild as part of the family network. Stepchildren identified by the parent as an important tie might be available for care giving. On the other hand, if stepchildren are not identified in the network, it shows that step-relationships are not salient and these stepchildren are most likely not available as care-givers. This network-based approach differs from previous studies, in which family boundaries in stepfamilies have often been assessed by studying boundary ambiguity at the couple level (Boss & Greenberg, 1984; Furstenberg, 1987; Pasley, 1987; Schmeeckle et al., 2006; Stewart, 2005). In these studies, inconsistency in partner’s reports on who is member of the household or who is member of the family is studied. Rather than studying the inconsistency in reports of children between parents in the same family, we study the family network as perceived by the stepparent. As such, we can determine whether stepparents are more or less likely to include stepchildren in 2009 than in 1992 and which factors are associated with including stepchildren in the family network.

Method

Respondents

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 12

We employ data from the research program Living Arrangements and Social Networks of Older Adults conducted in 1992 in the Netherlands (Knipscheer, De Jong Gierveld, Van Tilburg & Dykstra, 1995). A nationally representative random sample of 4,494 Dutch older adults born between 1903 and 1937 is used, with an overrepresentation of older men at baseline. The sample is stratified by age and gender. The cooperation rate was 62%. The sample was drawn from the population registers of 11 Dutch municipalities that differ with regard to urbanization and religion. Follow-ups among respondents born in 1908 or later were conducted by the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (LASA; Huisman et al., 2011) in 1992-1993 ( $N = 3,107$ ), 1995-1996 ( $N = 2,545$ ), 1998-1999 ( $N = 2,076$ ), 2001-2002 ( $N = 1,691$ ), 2005-2006 ( $N = 1,257$ ) and 2008-2009 ( $N = 835$ ). In 2002-2003, a new sample was taken in the context of LASA (born in 1938-1947;  $N = 1,002$ ) following the same sampling frame as the earlier cohorts with a cooperation rate of 62%. Follow-ups were carried out in 2005-2006 ( $N = 908$ ) and 2008-2009 ( $N = 833$ ). Across the follow-up observations 82% of the respondents was re-interviewed, 11% had died at each follow-up, 2% was too ill or too cognitively impaired to be interviewed, 5% refused to be re-interviewed, and less than 1% could not be contacted due to a residential relocation to another country or an unknown destination. The two datasets ( $N = 5,496$ ) were combined into one dataset including seven observations at a maximum, with the first observation (for respondents born between 1903 and 1937) held in 1992, the fifth observation in 2001-2003 (including the baseline observation for respondents born between 1938 and 1947), and the last observation in 2008-2009.

Table 1 provides the composition of our sample across observations. The composition was the result of several inclusion strategies of stepchild-stepparent relationships. At baseline (in 1992 or in 2002-2003) identification of children followed a two-step procedure. Initially, the

number of children was assessed by means of the question: “How many children do you have or have you had? You should consider not only the children whose natural mother (father) you are, but also stepchildren and adoptive children.” Subsequently, data were collected for each child in the demographic part of the interview: name and gender; whether the child was a biological child, stepchild, or adoptive child; and whether the child was deceased. From this demographic part of the interview, it was assessed whether the respondent was in a stepfamily. Additionally, interviewers were instructed to note whether respondents reported having stepchildren at any other moment in the interview. At the follow-up observations in 2001-2002 and 2005-2006 the parental status of respondents was also assessed. Names of the children reported at earlier observations were presented, followed by questions to identify additional children. In the network part of each interview, we assessed whether the stepchild is part of the family network by asking the respondent to name the children that are important and with whom there is regular contact. In case a stepchild was identified that was not previously reported, the stepparental status was corrected in the interview. We applied backwards correction if a stepparent (in the demographic or network part) only named a stepchild at a later observation, as we determined whether the particular partnership in which the stepchild is embedded existed at an earlier observation. In these cases we coded the dependent variable as the stepchild not being in the network at the earlier observation.

Of the 5,496 respondents, we excluded 255 respondents for whom we had no data on the existence of children or on characteristics of children due to shortened or broken off interviews because of frailty or other reasons, and 4,921 respondents who did not have stepchildren. Furthermore, stepparents were excluded because the stepchildren were from a previous partnership ( $n = 71$ ; in 7 cases there was a new partnership), all stepchildren were adolescent ( $n$

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 14

= 1) or information on the personal network was incomplete ( $n = 1$ ). In total, our analyses pertained to 247 stepparents (152 men and 95 women). As outlined in Table 1, most stepparents were included at the baseline observation among earlier birth cohorts in 1992 ( $n = 134$ ) or among later birth cohorts in 2002-2003 ( $n = 71$ ) when these birth cohorts were interviewed for the first time. For 33 (25%;  $n = 134$ ) and 11 (15%;  $n = 71$ ) respondents, respectively, the respondent mentioned children of the partner at a follow-up observation, i.e., at baseline they were stepparent and they reported the partnership but not the stepchildren. There were an additional 42 respondents who were included after baseline because they became stepparent in the course of the study.

In total there were 703 observations ( $M = 3.9$ ) available for the 247 respondents. For 89 respondents (36%;  $N = 247$ ) all follow-up observations were available including the 2008-2009 observation. Forty-one respondents (17%) died, resulting in fewer follow-up observations. We excluded 49 (20%) respondents from follow-up observations because their partnership ended, for example by death of the parent of the stepchildren. We missed follow-up observations from 26 respondents (11%) who refused to be interviewed, from 12 (5%) respondents ineligible to cooperate, from 23 respondents (9%) due to a shortened or broken off interview, and from 7 respondents (3%) born in 1907 or earlier included in the 1992-interview because follow-up observations were not performed for respondents born in these years. Results of multivariate logistic regression analysis showed that respondents for whom we missed follow-up data ( $n = 68$ ) when compared with respondents with all follow-up data, who died or who were not stepparent anymore ( $n = 179$ ) were more often men (odds ratio,  $OR = 2.14$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $Wald = 5.3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Age ( $df = 1$ ,  $Wald = 1.0$ ), partner status ( $df = 2$ ,  $Wald = 2.8$ ) and whether the stepparent



identified stepchildren in the network at the previous observation ( $df = 1$ ,  $Wald = .6$ ) were not significant predictors (all  $p > .05$ ).

Between the 1992 and 1998-1999 observations, the mean age at the interview increased slightly due to aging of the sample. Due to the inclusion of a new cohort of 55-64 year olds in 2002-2003, the mean age was lower in the 2002-2003 observation after which the mean age increased again in the 2005-2006 and 2008-2009 observations. The inclusion of all observations had three advantages. First, as some stepparents named a stepchild only in a later observation, taking into account all observations result in more complete information on the situation by backwards correction. Second, changes in the stepparent's situation (change from living-apart-together to marriage as relationship type for example) can be considered as a predictor of inclusion in the stepparents network. Finally, taking into account data on all observations with overlapping age groups instead of just comparing two observations resulted in a sample size that had sufficient statistical power to obtain reliable estimates of changes in membership of stepchildren in stepparents' network over time. This was less so for the smaller samples obtained in a design with only two observations (for example 1992 and 2008-2009).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for our analytical sample. Several characteristics of the sample are worth noting. The average network size is large, with on average 4.1 relatives and 5.6 non-kin relationships identified in the network. The duration of the partnership of the stepparent is on average quite long, to be specific 20.6 years, although there is considerable variation in the duration of the partnership as well ( $SD = 14.7$  years). Of the 247 stepparents 81% is part of a blended family with both biological and stepchildren and 16% is in a living-apart-together relationship (rather than cohabiting or married) at any of the seven

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 16

observations (not displayed).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

### Measurements

*Family network membership.* To obtain adequate information on their networks, respondents were asked to identify their personal network members using the domain-contact method (Van Tilburg, 1998). Network members were identified in seven domains: household members, children and their partners, other relatives, neighbors, colleagues from work or school, fellow members of organizations, and others (e.g., friends and acquaintances). For children, the following question was asked: "We would like to know with which children you have regular contact and who are also important to you." All network members were identified individually by name. Because we were interested in stepparents' boundaries of the family network we assessed whether one or more versus none stepchildren were identified as a network member.

*Partnership status and stepfamily formation.* Partner and marital status were assessed on the basis of various interview questions and using register data. We differentiated between respondents who were married, living with a partner and living-apart-together. We also assessed the duration of the partnership by subtracting the date of relationship initiation from the date of the interview. The procedure to outline the stepfamily formation has been described above. Of each individual child we asked various questions including their age. By combining the age of stepchildren at the time of the interview and the year the partnership was established, we assessed whether stepchildren were of adolescent or younger, minor age or adult at that time. In all observations where there was a living-apart-together partnership, this relationship was established when stepchildren were adults. There were two respondents currently living-apart-together who had co-resided before and established the partnership when stepchildren were

minor.

*Control variables.* We included age of the older parent at the time of the interview to control for age-related developments in our dependent variable. We also included the number of other relatives and of non-kin in the personal network. The level of education of the respondent was measured in numbers of years of completed education, and varied from 5 (less than primary school) to 18 (college or university). The number of biological and stepchildren alive was counted at each observation by asking respondents if any children were deceased. Gender composition describes the availability of stepdaughters and stepsons.

Procedure

The data were hierarchically structured, with observations (Level 1) nested within stepparents (Level 2). The study is based on longitudinal data in which observations of the same respondents across these observations are interrelated, however, our focus is not on trajectories of change of stepparent-stepchild relationships but on the effect of the year of observation (1992 to 2009). Although we take into account two variables that give an indication of these trajectories, namely age and partnership duration, these are merely included as control variables. The correlation between age at the interview and year is small ( $r = -.06$ ). To accommodate the design with observations nested in respondents we conducted multilevel logistic regression analysis by which differences between stepparents and dependence of the observations within stepparents are captured in separate error terms. An advantage of multilevel regression analyses for our sample with different moments of inclusion for younger and later birth cohorts is that the method allows individuals to be included in the analyses even if they do not have a complete set of observations for all observations. In addition, the dependency between observations for the same individuals is taken into account. Note that the dependent variable is at the level of

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 18

observations, which means that the regression analyses reflect network membership at a specific observation. Hereby we captured changes over time in stepparents' situation. We applied MLwiN (Rasbash, Steele, Browne, & Goldstein, 2009) and used the Iterative Generalized Least Squares method for estimation. We employed the forward modeling approach using an empty model (containing only a constant) at the start and added the parameters in the subsequent steps. Tolerance testing indicated that all independent variables qualified for the regression analysis assumption of absence of multicollinearity. In Model 1, we estimated whether the odds that stepparents had network membership of stepchildren changes across observations (Hypothesis 1) by taking into account a measure for the year in which the observation was made (we computed the time passed since January 1, 1992). We tested the linearity of the association by adding a quadratic term of year. In Model 2, we added control variables to determine whether the effect of year was robust. In Models 3 to 5, we examined stepfamily formation, partner status, and gender (Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4). Partner status is time varying, for example when a partnership starts in the form of a living-apart-together relationship, and changes into co-residence in the course of the study. Each model is characterized by the -2 log likelihood (deviance, i.e., the lack of correspondence between the model and the data). The difference between the deviance of the models is chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) distributed with the number of added parameters as degrees of freedom. In our analyses, we compared the deviance of our models to the preceding model, in order to determine whether there is an increased fit to the data. All predictor variables were centered around the mean. Estimates of fixed parameters and model parameters for the final model are presented, as this model provided the best fit to the data. To better understand what the actual size of the estimated coefficients mean, we calculated the percentage of respondents with stepchildren in their network for various values of predictor variables.

Results

Across all observations, 73% of the stepparents had stepchildren in their personal network. To put this figure in perspective: 92% of the 201 respondents who had biological children ( $N$  observations = 576) included one or more biological children in their network.

The results of regression Model 1 confirm Hypothesis 1, as network membership of stepchildren increased significantly between 1992 and 2009 ( $B = .07$ ;  $SE B = .02$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Adding a term for nonlinearity did not improve the model ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.3$ ;  $p > .05$ ) and the term was therefore removed from the regression equation. Considering the full span of the period of data collection, it was estimated that in January 1992 63% of the stepparents had stepchildren in their personal network, and this percentage had increased to 85% in October 2009. This is an increase of 22% over a time span of 17.7 years.

The incorporation of control variables in Model 2 improved the prediction ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 168.3$ ;  $p < .001$ ) of whether parents included stepchildren in their personal network, but did not alter the effect of year of observation ( $B = .06$ ;  $SE B = .02$ ; *Wald* for the test of differences of coefficients = .0;  $p > .05$ ). The more other relatives there were in the network, the more likely that stepchildren were included in the network. Controlled for effects of other predictor variables the estimates of including stepchildren were 69% when there was one relative (the first quartile) and 81% when there were five relatives (the third quartile). Having larger numbers of biological children made it less likely that stepchildren were included in the network: the estimates were 82% when there was one biological child and 76% when there were three. For the number of stepchildren, the effect is reversed: the estimates were 72% when there was one stepchild and 81% when there were three. Stepparent's age, number of non-kin in the network, educational level, and stepchildren's gender composition did not affect network membership of stepchildren.

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 20

In Model 3, we added stepfamily formation to the regression equation. This model was an improvement over the Model 2 prediction ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 42.8; p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2. When the stepfamily was formed when stepchildren were adult, stepparents were less likely to include stepchildren in their network (the estimate is 71%) compared to stepparents with stepfamily formation when children were of minor age (87%). Model 4 is an improvement over the previous model ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 41.1; p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3 pertaining to partner status. The estimates indicate that co-residing stepparents, whether they are married or not, were more likely to include stepchildren in their network (84% and 79%, respectively) than stepparents living-apart-together (53%). Noteworthy is that in this Model the effect of the timing of stepfamily formation is no longer significant, disputing Hypothesis 2. Improving the Model 4 prediction ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 26.0; p < .001$ ), in Model 5 the effect of gender was analyzed. Supporting Hypothesis 4, the results showed that stepmothers less often included stepchildren in their network (estimated as 69%) than stepfathers (83%). The parameters of Model 5 are presented in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

### Discussion

Although much is already known about the complexity and diversity of stepfamilies, less is known about the extent to which stepfamily boundaries have changed over time. We found evidence for our first hypothesis that Dutch stepparents' network membership of stepchildren has increased between 1992 and 2009. We estimated that in 1992 63% of the stepparents had stepchildren in their personal network, and this percentage was 85% in 2009. Also, we observed that network membership of stepchildren was strongly dependent on whether or not the stepparent co-resided with the partner. Stepparents in non-residential stepfamilies based on a

living-apart-together partnership less often included the stepchildren in their personal network, compared to stepparents in residential stepfamilies where stepchildren either entered the stepfamily as minors or adults. Stepmothers less often included stepchildren in their personal network than stepfathers.

We assessed the stepfamily boundaries by examining the existence of stepchildren in a varied manner. We increased the likelihood of identifying stepparental status by repeated probing. In case stepchildren were only identified in the network delineation procedure the result was an increase in the proportion of stepparents that have a stepchild in their network. In case other probes were successful in identifying the stepparental status the result was neutral because stepparents do not always include the stepchild in the family network. Furthermore, we took advantage of the longitudinal design by applying backwards correction. Information on the presence of stepchildren gathered in a follow-up observation was used to correct the stepparental status in a previous observation in case the partnership had not changed. Backwards correction resulted in a decrease in the proportion of stepparents that have a stepchild in their network at the previous observation as stepchildren were not identified in the family network. This multifaceted approach of inclusion of stepparent-stepchild relationships might have affected our results, but not necessarily in a specific direction.

Even with repeated probing and backwards correction it remains difficult to identify all stepfamilies. This problem is difficult to solve in survey research because it requires respondents' reports. Confirmatory register data on offspring of the partner is inaccessible, particularly when there is not an officially registered partnership. However, as stepfamilies become more common and more socially accepted, it is likely that underreporting of these relationships might have decreased over the course of time. It should be noted that a decrease in underreporting over time

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 22

would result in an underestimation of the results we found in this study, rather than an overestimation.

Another issue in the identification of stepchildren is that a demographic assessment of who is a stepchild might not be entirely congruent with the perception of being 'stepparent.' Such a discrepancy is particularly observable when looking at stepparents that have obtained stepchildren through living-apart-together relationships or are only recently cohabiting or married to their current partner. In these instances, although from a demographic point of view we would determine that there is a stepparent-stepchild relationship, not all stepparents might perceive themselves as being a 'stepparent'.

In this study the inclusion of stepchildren was dichotomous, i.e., we delineated personal networks and examined whether one or more of the stepchildren was identified as network member. It would also be valuable to examine the network membership of stepchildren in a more nuanced manner as illustrated by Schmeeckle et al. (2006). They observed that the extent to which adult children perceived their stepparents as family members and parents was diverse and ran along a continuum from *fully* to *not at all*, with a large proportion of responses in between with *quite a bit* and *a little*. Although some adult children may be definitive in their perceptions of potential parent figures (e.g., stepparents either are, or are not, family members or parents), others may be more equivocal. Variability in the strength of adult children's perceptions is also suggested by two other studies. Klee, Schmidt, and Johnson (1989) observed that many children only felt 'sort of' related to the stepparents. Gross (1986) observed that, even among children who included the stepparent as a family member, they were still not qualified as a full parents. The stepchildren's perceptions of the step-relationship are influenced by the development of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Ganong, Coleman, and Jamison (2011) emphasized the



complexity and variability in stepparent-stepchild relationships over time. Our results suggest that the perceptions of how individuals experience remarriage and stepfamilies have become more embedded in everyday life. The findings also amplify earlier studies that suggest that how individuals define their families themselves may be as relevant as the family structure itself (Van der Pas & van Tilburg, 2010). The traditional nuclear family has become ‘rigid’ in its structure, unable to accommodate the ‘permeable’ boundaries that now exist for many types of families. Whether the perceptions of stepfamily members are actually driven by the family as an ‘institution’ or primarily based on the individual relationship between stepparent and stepchild remains unclear. In the current study our focus was on the family as an institution and we analyzed the data at the family level. Future studies departing from the individual perspective may study changes over time taking into account variation between stepchildren within the same family.

Another focus of this study was to find factors associated with stepfamily boundaries. Guiding the choice of these factors was the family commitment perspective. This perspective argues that family members’ commitment is dependent on their assessment of whether the other family members want to continue their relationships in the future (Downs, 2004). We found evidence for our second hypothesis that the stepfamily boundaries are affected by the duration of the step-relationship, i.e., when the stepfamily was formed when stepchildren were adolescent or younger, it was more likely that stepchildren were included in the network. However, this effect was only observed when we did not control for partner status. Therefore, it was not so much the duration of the step-relationship that had an effect, but more the living arrangement of the stepparent. Supporting hypothesis 3 we observed that the inclusion of stepchildren in the network was dependent on the co-residence of the partners. In the event that the stepparent does not co-

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 24

1  
2  
3 reside with the partner (the biological parent of the stepchildren), inclusion of the stepchild in the  
4  
5 network is much lower than when the household is shared. The results suggest that co-residence  
6  
7 of the partners may be a kind of rite-of-passage for either the (step)parents themselves or the  
8  
9 adult children in accepting the physical presence of the stepparent into the household of the  
10  
11 stepparent.  
12  
13  
14

15 Stepmothers and stepfathers seemed to have different family boundaries when it comes to  
16  
17 stepchildren, as we stated in hypothesis 4. We observed that stepfathers more often included  
18  
19 stepchildren in their network than stepmothers. Prior studies have shown that the biological  
20  
21 father and the stepfather were both involved with their (step)children and did not substitute one  
22  
23 for the other (White & Gilbreth, 2001). As most children still live with their mothers after  
24  
25 separation, stepfathers may focus more on their 'new' stepfamily. The family commitment  
26  
27 perspective may also offer an explanation if one assumes that mothers stay more committed to  
28  
29 their biological children rather than their stepchildren.  
30  
31  
32  
33

34 A qualitative study of Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, and Turman (2001) based on  
35  
36 interviews with blended family members showed that becoming a 'family' is a developmental  
37  
38 process that can take on various pathways. In many cases, establishing a sense of 'family' that  
39  
40 was satisfying to its members took several years. It was observed that boundary management,  
41  
42 solidarity and adaptation were particularly salient issues in the experiences of stepparents and  
43  
44 stepchildren in blended families. They found that families who took their time to develop closer  
45  
46 relationships between stepfamily members, had greater flexibility, open communication and  
47  
48 constructive conflict were most successful in reaching a new definition of family satisfying to its  
49  
50 members. Our finding that stepparents are increasingly likely to name a stepchild as an important  
51  
52 and regular contact could be influenced by better boundary management, more flexibility and  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

increased prevalence of constructive conflict in stepfamilies nowadays. Such a proposition could be worth exploring in subsequent studies that allow more understanding on the processes by which stepchildren become part (or do not become part) of the network of the stepparent.

Although this study focuses on Dutch older adults, we do not expect the increase in stepparents' network identification of stepchildren found in our study to be unique to the Netherlands. Societal processes of loss of the strength of traditional communities have also characterized other Northern and Western European countries as well as the United States (Allan, 2001). As part of this change, an increase in non-traditional partnerships and family behavior over the last decades has also been witnessed in these countries (Lesthaege, 1994). Therefore, we would also expect broadly similar developments towards inclusion of stepchildren in older stepparents networks in these countries. Despite this, differences in the particular societal context could result in different rates of change. As stated in the introduction, the Netherlands has lower rates of remarriage than the United States, making stepfamilies a more normal part of life in the United States. On the other hand, research on values suggests that the United States may be more traditional in their public opinion on family behavior . Cross-national studies or multiple national studies are needed to determine how changes in the social-cultural context over the last decades have affected stepparent-stepchildren relationships in different settings.

One way to continue research on family boundaries in stepfamilies is to explore whether an increase in inclusion of step-relationships in the family may have a positive effect on support and caregiving when stepparents become dependent. Contact between parents and stepchildren is considered an important prerequisite for functional solidarity, among others the provision of instrumental and emotional assistance (Parott & Bengtson, 1999). Therefore, the finding that older parents are more likely to name a stepchild as an important tie with whom regular contact

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 26

is maintained, may have positive consequences for the future caregiving potential of families. However, as stated earlier, recent research shows that obligations to support older parents are weaker when parents are not biologically related (Ganong & Coleman, 2006). We therefore do not know whether step-relationships will continue to exist when the partner relationship ceases due to death or separation and/or when dependency arises. The degree to which more parent-stepchild contact will be translated in more support exchange between older parents and stepchildren will almost certainly also be dependent on the filial responsibility norms that people will attach to these relationships. Future studies could provide more evidence on the pressing issue of change of family boundaries and of intergenerational support and help over the life course of parents and children living in a stepfamily.

## References

- Allan, G. A. (2001). Personal relationships in late modernity. *Personal Relationships*, 8, 325-339. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6811.2001.tb00043.x
- Allan, G. A., Hawker, S., & Crow, G. (2001). Family diversity and change in Britain and Western Europe. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22, 819-837. DOI: 10.1177/019251301022007002
- Amato, P. R., & James, S. (2010). Divorce in Europe and the United States: Commonalities and differences across nations. *Family Science*, 1, 2-13. DOI: 10.1080/19424620903381583
- Blossfeld, H. P., & Müller, R. (2002). Union disruption in comparative perspective: The role of assortative partner choice and careers of couples. *International Sociology*, 32, 3-35. [www.jstor.org/stable/20628664](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20628664)
- Boss, P. (1980). The relationship of psychological father presence, wife's personal qualities and wife/family dysfunction in families of missing fathers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 42, 541-549. DOI: 10.2307/351898

1  
2  
3 Boss, P., & Greenberg, J. (1984). Family boundary ambiguity: A new variable in family stress  
4 theory. *Family Process*, 23, 535-546. DOI: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.1984.00535.x  
5  
6  
7  
8 Braithwaite, D., Olson, L., Golish, T., Soukup, C., & Turman, P. (2001). "Becoming a family":  
9 Developmental processes represented in blended family discourse. *Journal of Applied*  
10 *Communication Research*, 29, 221-247. DOI: 10.1080/00909880128112  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15 Brown, S. L. & Fen-Lin, I. (2012). The gray divorce revolution: Rising divorce among middle-  
16 aged and older adults, 1990-2010. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 67B, 731-741.  
17 DOI:10.1093/geronb/gbs089.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22 Brown, S. L., & Manning, W. D. (2009). Family boundary ambiguity and the measurement of  
23 family structure: The significance of cohabitation. *Demography*, 46, 85-101. DOI:  
24 10.1353/dem.0.0043  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29 Bumpass, L., Sweet, J., & Castro Martin, T. (1990). Changing patterns of remarriage. *Journal of*  
30 *Marriage and Family*, 52, 747-756. www.jstor.org/stable/352939  
31  
32  
33  
34 Carroll, J. S., Olson, C. D., & Buckmiller, N. (2007). Family boundary ambiguity: A 30-year  
35 review of theory, research, and measurement. *Family Relations*, 56, 210-230. DOI:  
36 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00453.x  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41 Cherlin, A. J. (1978). Remarriage as an incomplete institution. *American Journal of Sociology*,  
42 84, 634-650. DOI: 10.1086/226830  
43  
44  
45  
46 Cherlin, A.J. (2004). The de-institutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and*  
47 *Family*, 66, 848-61. DOI: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00058.x  
48  
49  
50  
51 Cherlin, A. J. (2010). Demographic trends in the United States: A review of research in the  
52 2000s. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 403-419. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-  
53 3737.2010.00710.x  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 28

- Cherlin, A. J., & Furstenberg, F. F. (1988). The changing European family: Lessons for the American reader. *Journal of Family Issues*, 9, 291-297. DOI: 10.1177/019251388009003001
- Cooney, T. M., & Dunne, K. (2001). Intimate relationships in later life. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22, 838-858. DOI: 10.1177/019251301022007003
- De Jong Gierveld, J. (2004). Remarriage, unmarried cohabitation, living apart together: Partner relationships following bereavement or divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 236-243. DOI: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00015.x
- Downs, K. J. M. (2004). Family commitment, role perception, social support, and mutual children in remarriage. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 40, 35-53. DOI: 10.1300/J087v40n01\_03
- Furstenberg, F. F. (1987). The new extended family: The experience of parents and children after remarriage. In K. Paley & M. Ihinger-Tallman (Eds.), *Remarriage and stepparenting: Current research and theory* (pp. 42-61). New York: Guilford Press.
- Ganong, L. H., & Coleman, M. (2004). *Stepfamily relationships: Developments, dynamics and interventions*. New York: Kluwer.
- Ganong, L. H., & Coleman, M. (2006). Obligations to stepparents acquired in later life: Relationship quality and acuity of needs. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 61B, S80-S88. <http://psychsocgerontology.oxfordjournals.org/content/61/2/S80>
- Ganong, L. H., Coleman, M., & Jamison, T. (2011). Patterns of stepchild-stepparent relationship development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73, 396-413. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00814.x
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Graaf, de P. M., & Kalmijn, M. (2006). Change and stability in the social determinants of divorce: A comparison of marriage cohorts in the Netherlands. *European Sociological Review*, 22, 561-572. DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcl010

Gross, P. (1986). Defining post-divorce remarriage families: A typology based on the subjective perceptions of children. *Journal of Divorce*, 10, 205-217. DOI: 10.1300/J279v10n01\_14

Huisman, M., Poppelaars, J., Van der Horst, M., Beekman, A. T. F., Brug, J., Van Tilburg, T. G., & Deeg, D. J. H. (2011). Cohort profile: The Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (LASA). *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 40, 868-876. DOI: 10.1093/ije/dyq219

Ihinger-Tallmann, M., & Pasley, K. (2008). Stepfamilies in 1984 and today: A scholarly perspective. *Marriage & Family Review*, 26, 19-40. DOI: 10.1300/J002v26n01\_03

Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, cultural change and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review*, 65, 19-51. DOI: 10.2307/2657288.

Kahn, R. L., & Antonucci, T. C. (1981). Convoys of social support: A life course approach. In S. B. Kiesler, J. N. Morgan, & V. K. Oppenheimer (Eds.), *Aging: Social change* (pp. 383-405). New York: Academic Press.

Kalmijn, M. (2007). Gender differences in the effects of divorce, widowhood and remarriage on intergenerational support: Does marriage protect fathers? *Social Forces*, 85, 1079-1104. DOI: 10.1353/sof.2007.0043

Klee, L., Schmidt, C., & Johnson, C. (1989). Children's definitions of family following divorce of their parents. *Journal of Divorce*, 12, 109-127. DOI: 10.1300/J279v12n02\_05

Knipscheer, C. P. M., De Jong Gierveld, J., Van Tilburg, T. G., & Dykstra, P. A. (Eds.) (1995). *Living arrangements and social networks of older adults*. Amsterdam: VU University Press.



## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 30

- Kraaykamp, G. (2002). Trends and countertrends in sexual permissiveness: Three decades of attitude change in the Netherlands 1965-1995. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 225-239. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00225.x
- Latten, J. J. (2004). Trends in samenwonen en trouwen: De schone schijn van burgerlijke staat [Trends in cohabitation and marriage: The false appearance of marital status]. *Bevolkingstrends*, 4e kwartaal, 46-60.
- Lesthaege, R. (1994). The second demographic transition in Western countries: An interpretation. In K. Oppenheim Mason & A-M. Jensen (Eds.), *Gender and family change in industrialized countries* (pp. 17-62). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Marsiglio, W. (1992). Stepfathers with minor children living at home: Parenting perceptions and relationship quality. *Journal of Family Issues*, 13, 195-214. DOI: 10.1177/019251392013002005
- Parrott, T. M., & Bengston, V. L. (1999). The effects of earlier intergenerational affection, normative expectations, family conflict on contemporary exchanges of help and support. *Research on Aging*, 21, 73-105. DOI: 10.1177/0164027599211004
- Parsons, T., & Bales, R. F. (1955). *Family, socialization and interaction process*. London: Routledge.
- Pasley, K. (1987). Family boundary ambiguity: Perceptions of adult stepfamily members. In K. Pasley & M. Ihinger-Tallman (Eds.), *Remarriage and stepparenting: Current research and theory* (pp. 206-224). New York: Guilford.
- Pezzin, L. E., Pollak, R. A., & Steinberg Schone, B. (2008). Parental marital disruption, family type, and transfers to disabled elderly parents. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 63B, S349-S358. <http://psychsocgerontology.oxfordjournals.org/content/63/6/S349>



Poortman, A. R., & Mills, M. (2012). Investments in marriage and cohabitation: The role of legal and interpersonal commitment. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 357-376. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2011.00954.x

Rasbash, J., Steele, F., Browne, W. J., & Goldstein, H. (2009). *A user's guide to MLwiN*. Bristol, UK: Centre for Multilevel Modelling, University of Bristol.

Rosenthal, C. J. (1985). Kinkeeping in the familial division of labor. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 47, 965-974. DOI: 10.2307/352340

Schmeeckle, M. (2007). Gender dynamics in stepfamilies: Adult stepchildren's views. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 174-189. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00352.x

Schmeeckle, M., Giarrusso, R., Feng, D., & Bengtson, V. L. (2006). What makes someone family? Adult children's perceptions of current and former stepparents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 595-610. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00277.x

Seltzer, J. A. (1991). Relationships between fathers and children who live apart: The father's role after separation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 53, 79-101. DOI: 10.2307/353135

Smith, D. E. (1993). The standard North American family: SNAF as an ideological code. *Journal of Family Issues*, 14, 50-65. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X93014001005

Statistics Netherlands (1999). *Vital events: Past, present and future of the Dutch population*. The Hague: Statistics Netherlands.

Stewart, S. D. (2005). Boundary ambiguity in stepfamilies. *Journal of Family Issues*, 26, 1002-1029. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X04273591

Sweeney, M. M. (2010). Remarriage and stepfamilies: Strategic sites for family scholarship in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 667-684. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00724.x

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 32

- Teachman, J., & Tedrow, L. (2008). The demography of stepfamilies in the United States. In J. Pryor (Eds.), *The international handbook of stepfamilies: Policy and practice in legal, research and clinical environments* (pp. 3-29). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley. DOI: 10.1002/9781118269923
- The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (1994). *Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 1994* [Social and Cultural Report 1994]. Rijswijk: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research.
- Thornton, A., & Young-DeMarco, L. (2001). Four decades of trends in attitudes toward family issues in the United States: The 1960's through the 1990's. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 1009-1037. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.01009.x
- Van der Pas, S., & Van Tilburg, T. G. (2010). The influence of family structure on the contact between older parents and their adult biological children and stepchildren in the Netherlands. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 65B, 236-245. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbp108
- Van Tilburg, T.G. (1998). Losing and gaining in old age: Changes in personal network size and social support in a four-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 53B, S313-S323. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/53B.6.S313
- Walker, K. N., & Messinger, L. (1979). Remarriage after divorce: Dissolution and reconstruction of family boundaries. *Family Process*, 18, 185-192. DOI: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.1979.00185.x
- White, L., & Gilbreth, J. G. (2001). When children have two fathers: Effects of relationships with stepfathers and noncustodial fathers on adolescent outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 155-167. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00155.x

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

Table 1

*Composition of the sample by observation and by age*

	1992	1992-	1995-	1998-	2001-	2005-	2008-	All
Observation		1993	1996	1999	2003	2006	2009	
First observation (cohorts included in 1992)	134	7	10	6	4	3	3	167
Follow-up observation (cohorts 1992)		98	77	56	48	37	28	344
First observation (cohorts included in 2002)					71	6	3	80
Follow-up observation (cohorts 2002)						57	55	112
<i>N</i>	2126	105	87	62	123	103	89	703
Mean Age	69.5	69.3	70.8	70.8	65.6	68.3	70.5	69.0
<i>SD</i> Age	9.4	8.8	8.1	6.4	8.1	7.7	7.0	8.3

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 34

Table 2

*Year of Observation, Demographic and Control Variables: Descriptive Statistics (N = 703 observations)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Year of observation <sup>a</sup>	7.50	6.11	.02 – 17.74
Age <sup>b</sup>	69.02	8.31	54.21 – 91.24
Number of relatives in network	4.11	4.33	0 – 29
Number of non-kin in network	5.56	4.95	0 – 34
Educational level <sup>b</sup>	9.85	3.44	5 – 18
Duration of partnership <sup>b</sup>	20.57	14.73	0.08 – 69.44
Number of biological children	2.17	1.71	0 – 10
Number of stepchildren	2.40	1.39	1 – 7
Stepdaughters and stepsons <sup>c</sup>	.44	.50	
Stepdaughters only <sup>c</sup>	.28	.45	
Stepsons only <sup>c</sup>	.27	.45	
Stepfamily formation when child is adult <sup>d</sup>	.68	.47	
Co-residing, married <sup>c</sup>	.59	.49	
Co-residing, not married <sup>c</sup>	.23	.42	
Not co-residing (living-apart-together) <sup>c</sup>	.18	.39	
Female <sup>d</sup>	.39	.49	

Note: Data are from 247 respondents.

<sup>a</sup> Years since January 1, 1992. <sup>b</sup> Years. <sup>c</sup> Dummy variable. <sup>d</sup> Stepfamily formation: 1 = *At adult age*, 0 = *At minor age*. <sup>e</sup> Female: 1 = *Female*, 0 = *Male*.

Table 3

*Summary of Multilevel Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Network Membership of Stepchildren (N = 703 observations)*

Predictor	B	SE B	OR
Year of observation	0.08***	0.02	1.08
Age	0.01	0.02	1.01
Number of relatives in network	0.17***	0.04	1.18
Number of non-kin in network	0.05	0.03	1.05
Educational level	-0.01	0.04	0.99
Duration of partnership	-0.01	0.01	0.99
Number of biological children	-0.17*	0.07	0.85
Number of stepchildren	0.26*	0.12	1.30
Stepdaughters only	-0.02	0.34	0.98
Stepsons only	0.31	0.36	1.37
Stepfamily formation at adult age	-0.31	0.33	0.73
Co-residing, not married	-0.29	0.31	0.75
Not co-residing (living-apart-together)	-1.53***	0.33	0.22
Female	-0.83**	0.28	0.44
Constant	1.30***	0.13	3.67
$\chi^2$	312.0		
df	14		

*Note:* Data are from 247 respondents. OR = Odds Ratio. Year of observation coded as number of years since January 1, 1992. Age, educational level and duration of partnership are in years.

## STEPPARENTS' FAMILY BOUNDARIES 36

Stepdaughters only, and stepsons only coded as 1 for *yes* and 0 for *no*. Stepdaughters and stepsons is the reference category. Stepfamily formation at adult age coded as 1 for *adult age* and 0 for *minor age*. Co-residing, not married, and not co-residing (living-apart-together) coded as 1 for *yes* and 0 for *no*. Co-residing, married, is the reference category. Female coded as 1 for *female* and 0 for *male*. All predictor variables centered around their mean.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .